

# **Environmental Security in the Czech Republic: Status and Concerns in the Post-Communist Era**

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INSS Occasional Paper 22

*Environmental Security Series*

October 1998

USAF Institute for National Security Studies  
USAF Academy, Colorado



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## FOREWORD

We are pleased to publish this twenty-second volume in the *Occasional Paper* series of the US Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). We offer it to our readers as a well-crafted first-stage environmental country study. Captain Valley details the political and economic issues, players, policies, and consequences of Cold War environmental degradation and post-Cold War environmental recovery efforts. He also fully addresses the external political, economic, and security implications on relations between the Czech Republic and key neighbors. Environmental factors are increasingly important in national security terms, and this study stands as a fine example of how one can address those factors in security terms. The next step would be to add implications for defense spending and on the operation of Czech military installations, the conduct of training and exercises, etc. Further, a second-stage study would add focus to the environmental factors that will influence the Czech Republic membership and participation in NATO. But those factors are for the next stage. For now, we offer Captain Valley's excellent first-stage environmental country study.

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JAMES M. SMITH  
Director



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Czech Republic has made great strides toward reconciling its political and economic development with environmental protection and security issues since its recent democratization. Significant environmental advancements have been attained primarily as the result of the passage of new environmental legislation, the acquisition of new technologies, and increased public knowledge of environmental issues.

Automobiles, industries, and power plants emit significant amounts of pollutants into the air and water, although new technological and legislative efforts continue to work toward reducing these emissions. Coal mining, as well, continues to destroy thousands of acres of Czech lands, but reclamation efforts have been successful in revitalizing these areas. Although environmental problems persist, the Republic is committed to continuing its battle against air and water pollution, poor waste management practices, and the needless destruction of nature.

In addition to incorporating new industrial technologies, the Republic has received informational and financial assistance from other European countries and the United States. This has been especially beneficial to the Republic's clean-up efforts and its quest for new economical, efficient, and environmentally safe alternative energy sources. Privatization in the Republic has also aided in these efforts internally. Private reclamation companies are providing a much needed, and effective, service to the country as they work toward reclaiming destroyed lands and solving other environmental problems.

The Republic has also enacted several new pieces of environmental legislation, particularly the Clean Air Act of 1991, the amended Water Management Act of 1992, the Czech National Council Act on the Protection of Nature and the Landscape of 1992, the Waste Management Act of 1992, and the Waste Control Act of 1997. The

passage of these laws represents a great step toward improving the environment, but it remains to be seen whether or not the government can successfully enforce the legislation, in part due to its current unstable economy. This instability and some inherent skepticism from bordering countries have raised concerns with the Republic's neighbors, particularly with transboundary air and water pollution issues.

A shift to alternative energy sources, particularly natural gas and nuclear power, would decrease the amount of air and water pollutants and provide more efficient means of energy production. It appears this shift, at least to some extent, will occur in the Republic in the near future. Shifting the structure of primary energy sources to qualitatively better fuels, along with the introduction of less energy-consuming technologies and the activation of new nuclear reactors, would eventually replace most of the output of coal burning power plants.

The use of nuclear power has been opposed by several political and environmental activist groups. In particular, Greenpeace and local activist groups have been protesting the construction of the Temelin Nuclear Power Plant. Internal confrontations have increased, with environmental groups providing negative propaganda about industrial activities and nuclear power to the Czech general public. The potential for internal conflict may rise with continued nuclear power advancements; and although not a major problem at this time, it should be considered an increasingly possible threat in the coming months and years.

The Republic's current relationships with neighboring countries have been strengthened through a series of negotiations and bilateral agreements concerning air and water pollution, waste management, and nature protection. Overall, relationships with Poland and Germany appear solid; and although political, ideological, and economic

differences exist with Slovakia, Czech-Slovak diplomatic ties remain stable.

Also at the international level, Austria's opposition to nuclear power and the construction of the Temelin Nuclear Power Plant is of greater concern. Since Austria is a non-nuclear state and propagates negative information about nuclear power to its citizens and other countries, one can see the reason for concern. To this point, there have been no political or military threats, or violent confrontations, but concerns are rising as the operational date of the new Temelin reactor site approaches (projected for July 1999).

The Republic's infrastructure appears to be intact and is successfully supporting the environmental issues facing it today. The country's environmental developments and efforts to pass new environmental legislation were impressive; however, due to the Republic's current political and economic instability and uncertain forecast, continued foreign support and investment will undoubtedly be necessary for the Republic to reach the level of environmental security and safety of other westernized countries. The supportive relationships between neighboring countries, government agencies, private reclamation companies, and industries were also impressive. Although concern involving internal or international conflict is not great at this time, certain issues, especially transboundary pollution problems and the nuclear power debate, warrant continued monitoring.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank the following individuals for their administrative, logistic, and editorial support (*in alphabetical order*).

- Chris Bell, Policy Analyst, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Environmental Security/International Activities, Washington, D.C.
- Marja Hynkova, Assistant to the Environment, Science, and Technology (EST) Officer, United States Embassy, Prague, Czech Republic
- Douglas McNeal, EST Officer, United States Embassy, Prague, Czech Republic
- Robert K. Noyd, Associate Professor of Biology, United States Air Force Academy
- John L. Putnam, Assistant Professor of Biology, United States Air Force Academy
- Marybeth Ulrich, Associate Professor of Political Science, United States Air Force Academy
- Michael Voyles, USAR, Language Interpreter, Det 1, Co A, 377th MIBn

I would also like to thank the Army Environmental Policy Institute (AEPI) for its sponsorship and financial support of this project.



